



ANDRZEJ TOMASZEWSKI'S "PLURALISTIC CONSERVATION PHILOSOPHY" AS A CHALLENGE: DO WE HAVE A PROBLEM WITH EUROPEAN IDENTITY?

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ABSTRACT: In the well-known and frequently cited article by Prof. Andrzej Tomaszewski, *Towards a Pluralistic Philosophy of Conservation in the 21st Century*, from 2002, the history of heritage conservation was divided into three periods. The earliest was called the period of “primary pluralism” because the diversity of concepts and approaches to conservation issues resulted from the isolation of individual “cultural areas” on the world map. The specificity of the second period was determined by efforts to unify the theoretical foundations of conservation work by popularising European experiences and models which, as it was once believed, were universal. The third period, which Tomaszewski believed we entered at the beginning of the 21st century, should be a time of “universal pluralism”, and the contemporary philosophy of conservation, focused on the issues of protecting cultural diversity on a global scale, will no longer turn against local experiences and traditions. The article aims to analyse the assumptions of the pluralism postulated by Tomaszewski in the context of the development of heritage studies and the transformation of UNESCO's global conservation policy. The periodisation proposed by Tomaszewski will be used as a primary reference for analyses aimed at identifying those trends in contemporary conservation discourse that engage in polemics with Eurocentric views. In the summary of considerations on Eurocentrism, an attempt will also be made to answer whether the progressive relativisation of European conservation traditions and values is equivalent to their invalidation as a starting point for new regional concepts for the protection and conservation of architectural heritage. The article will use the results of an analysis of UNESCO and ICOMOS documents, current research by conservation theorists and selected publications in contemporary heritage studies.

KEY WORDS: Conservation theory, Nara Document on Authenticity, pluralism, conservation Eurocentrism, difficult heritage

In the well-known and frequently quoted article by Prof. Andrzej Tomaszewski, *Towards a Pluralistic Philosophy of Conservation in the 21st Century*¹, the history of our discipline is divided into three periods. The earliest was called the period of “primary pluralism” because the diversity of concepts and approaches to conservation issues resulted from the isolation of individual “cultural areas” on the world map. The specificity of the second period was determined by efforts to unify the theoretical foundations of our discipline by popularising European experiences and models. Unlike the first two, the third period, which Tomaszewski believed we had entered at the beginning of the 21st century, should be a time of “universal pluralism”, in which conservation philosophy will no longer turn against local experiences and traditions. It should take into account cultural diversity on a global scale, and for this reason, it was compared by Tomaszewski to:

*“a flower, the petals of which will be regional philosophies and approaches, while those aspects which they have in common will be presented by the shared centre”*²

Almost a quarter of a century has passed since Tomaszewski’s article was published. From that perspective, one can consider whether the direction of changes in international conservation doctrine corresponds to the forecasts and postulates formulated therein. So, based on theory and doctrine in the 21st century, has it been possible to overcome the weaknesses of conservation thinking that occurred in the previous period while simultaneously preserving what we consider to be the valuable contribution of the past to the further development of our discipline?

Tomaszewski saw the specificity of the second period of conservation theory, which was to be contained in the 20th century, in the pursuit of the integration of the international conservation movement through the dissemination of European models and experiences, including the participation of international organisations such as ICCROM and ICOMOS. It soon turned out that with the increasing globalisation of the idea of world heritage, the European origin of the conservation concepts, referring to doctrinal documents of such rank as the Athens Charter or the Venice Charter, may be more of a burden than an asset in international cooperation. In the community of experts gathered around the idea of world heritage, for example, the risk of losing the credibility of the assumptions of UNESCO's conservation policy was pointed out if the profound imbalance between the assets representing the achievements of the Western world and those that are to reflect the richness of traditions and experiences of non-European cultures,

¹ Tomaszewski A. (2002) Towards a pluralistic philosophy of conservation, [in:] *Estrategias relativas al patrimonio cultural mundial. La salvaguarda en un mundo globalizado. Principios, practicas y perspectivas. 13th ICOMOS General Assembly and Scientific Symposium. Actas* (pp. 212-215). Madrid: Comité Nacional Español del ICOMOS. Three years earlier, the text was presented in Kraków during the preparatory conference of the "Karta 2000" congress, and a publication containing its English, French and Spanish versions (published by the Centre for the Protection of Historic Landscape in Warsaw) was distributed to delegations to the 12th General Assembly of ICOMOS in Mexico and to delegations to the 23rd Session of the World Heritage Committee in Marrakesh. A year later, the Polish version of the article was published, see: Tomaszewski A. (2000). Ku pluralistycznej filozofii konserwatorskiej w XXI wieku. *Ochrona Zabytków* (1) (pp. 1-4).

² Ibiem (p. 215).

would persist on the World Heritage List. Significantly, one of the reasons for this state of affairs was already considered to be the European understanding of the authenticity of architectural monuments in the procedures approved by the World Heritage Committee³

The growing divergence of positions on critical doctrinal issues towards the end of the 20th century was evidenced by the first attempts to question the significance of European values and principles of conservation practice in official ICOMOS documents. The resolution adopted during the organisation's General Assembly in Colombo in 1993 stated, among other things, that Western conservation philosophy "does not necessarily have universal value"⁴. A year later, in the introduction to the preamble to *The Nara Document on Authenticity*, it was emphasised that the aim of the conference was to:

*"challenge conventional thinking in the conservation field, and debate ways and means of broadening our horizons to bring greater respect for cultural and heritage diversity to conservation practice"*⁵

Knut Larsen was deeply convinced of the exceptional significance of the revaluations taking place at that time. In the foreword to the post-conference materials from Nara, he categorically stated that "*international preservation doctrine has moved from a Eurocentric approach to a post-modern position, characterised by recognition of cultural relativism*"⁶.

The introduction of the concept of Eurocentrism into the conservation discourse had far-reaching consequences not only for debates on the future of heritage theory and the theoretical foundations for its protection but also for the evolution of the assumptions of the conservation policy of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, which resulted in the formulation of new goals and tasks that were to be implemented within the framework of the *global strategy*⁷. Regarding the ongoing revaluations, the spectrum of research interests of historians of monument conservation has also broadened. In the latest studies in this field, more and more attention is being

³ Pressouyre L. (1993). *La Convention du patrimoine mondial, vingt ans après*. Paris: Editions UNESCO; World Heritage Committee (1994). *Report of the Expert Meeting on the "Global Strategy" and Thematic Studies for a Representative World Heritage List (20-22 June 1994)* (WHC-94/CONF.003/INF.6). (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/documents/1566>) (retrieved: 21.05.2023).

⁴ ICOMOS (1996). *10th General Assembly Colombo Proceedings*. Padukka: ICOMOS Sri Lanka. (p. 123). (<https://openarchive.icomos.org/id/eprint/1679/1/AG1993.pdf>) (retrieved: 20.10.2022).

⁵ *Nara Document on Authenticity* (1995), [in:] Nara Conference on Authenticity in Relation to the World Heritage Convention, Nara, Japan, 1–6 November 1994: Proceedings (p. 21). Trondheim: Tapir Publishers.

⁶ Larsen K. (1995). *Preface* [in:] Nara Conference on Authenticity in Relation to the World Heritage Convention, Nara, Japan, 1–6 November 1994: Proceedings (p. 12). Trondheim: Tapir Publishers.

⁷ Labadi S. (2005). A review of the Global Strategy for a balanced, representative and credible World Heritage List 1994–2004. *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites* 7(2), (pp. 89-102), DOI: 10.1179/135050305793137477; Cameron Ch., Rössler M. (2013). *Many Voices, One Vision: The Early Years of the World Heritage Convention*, London : Routledge.

paid to problems resulting from the historical domination of the Western world⁸. Historians trace the roots of Eurocentrism in conservation to the period of the colonial expansion of European states, when it was taken for granted that European achievements in theory and practice should also be disseminated to other cultures, often described as “primitive” or “barbaric”. The sense of responsibility for carrying out these particular “civilising missions” was derived from a belief in the universal values on which European culture was believed to be based, and which “for the good of all humanity” should be recognised as binding beyond the borders of the Western world. As Falser⁹ has shown in his work, scientific research played an important role in cultural policy in colonised territories, in the recognition, classification and assessment of artefacts owned by the indigenous inhabitants of these lands. The artefacts considered most valuable were treated as if they were monuments and works of art¹⁰. Current analyses of the broad context of these research, museum and conservation practices emphasise that the colonial expansion and exploitation of the cultural heritage of overseas peoples contributed to the growth of the economic and political power of the colonising countries and were also considered a matter of pride and a source of prestige not only for these countries but also for the nations inhabiting them¹¹.

The initiatives of the International Bureau of Museums from the League of Nations era were not entirely free from Eurocentric assumptions, in which, in the name of the ideals of cultural internationalism, the concept of the *patrimoine commun de l'humanité* (*common heritage of all humanity*) was promoted¹². This concept remained a critical reference point for those international initiatives undertaken after World War II. Without questioning the enormous merits of UNESCO, which consistently supported the process of building identity in post-colonial countries, helping to identify, protect and secure the most valuable elements of their

⁸ Glendinning M. (2013). *The Conservation Movement: A History of Architectural Preservation, Antiquity to Modernity*. London: Routledge; Harrison R. (2013). *Heritage. Critical Approaches*. London: Routledge; Gfeller A.É. (2017). The Authenticity of Heritage: Global Norm-Making at the Crossroads of Cultures. *The American Historical Review* 122(3), (pp. 758-791), DOI:10.1093/ahr/122.3.758; Meskell L. (2018). *A Future in Ruins: UNESCO, World Heritage, and the Dream of Peace*, Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press; Brumann Ch. (2018). Anthropological Utopia, Closet Eurocentrism, and Culture Chaos in the UNESCO World Heritage Arena, *Anthropological Quarterly* 91(4), (pp. 1203-1233), DOI: 10.1353/anq.2018.0063; Krawczyk J. (2024). The Venice Charter in the light of research on conservation Eurocentrism; Karta Wenecka w świetle badań nad europocentryzmem konserwatorskim. *Wiadomości Konserwatorskie – Journal of Heritage Conservation* (79).

⁹ Falser M. (2015). Cultural Heritage as Civilizing Mission: Methodological Considerations, [in:] *Cultural Heritage as Civilizing Mission: From Decay to Recovery* (pp. 1-32).: Heidelberg: Springer.

¹⁰ Rehling A. (2014). Kulturen unter Artenschutz? Vom Schutz der Kulturschätze als Gemeinsames Erbe der Menschheit zur Erhaltung kultureller Vielfalt, [in:] *Global Commons im 20. Jahrhundert: Entwürfe für eine globale Welt*. (pp. 109-138). Berlin, München, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg.

¹¹ Smith L. (2006). *Uses of Heritage*. London: Routledge.

¹² Passini M., (2018). Le patrimoine à l'épreuve de l'histoire transnationale. Circulations culturelles et évolutions du régime patrimonial pendant les années 1930, [in:] *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* (137), (pp. 49-61), DOI: 10.3917/ving.137.0049; Krawczyk J. (2024). The Venice Charter in the light of research on conservation Eurocentrism; Karta Wenecka w świetle badań nad europocentryzmem konserwatorskim. *Wiadomości Konserwatorskie – Journal of Heritage Conservation* (79).

national heritage, it is worth noting that in the initial period of this activity, no particular need was perceived to protect cultural diversity¹³. The efforts to internationalise the field of monument conservation as widely as possible were included in the framework of those UNESCO activities undertaken to further world political and cultural integration. These activities were guided by the ideals of the *scientific world humanism* of Julian Huxley¹⁴, director of UNESCO in 1946-48; ideals that grew out of Western beliefs about the prospects for the development of backward societies and the possibilities of promoting progress on a global scale¹⁵.

Undoubtedly, UNESCO's cultural policy in the 1960s created conditions conducive to the expansion of European conservation thought far beyond the continent's borders. Milestones in this process were events such as the Venice Congress in 1964 and the establishment of ICOMOS a year later. On the other hand, it is hard to deny Tomaszewski's¹⁶ point when he wrote about the Eurocentric nature of the organisation's activities in the first years of its existence. Françoise Choay also spoke critically about the global aspirations of the European conservation community in the 1970s and 1980s, claiming that introducing solutions taken from the Venice Charter into *The UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* was equivalent to "announcing the universality of the Western system of thought and values in this field"¹⁷.

In characterising the period in which the international conservation movement supported by UNESCO initiatives achieved such spectacular successes, British historian Miles Glendinning¹⁸ devoted much attention to the manifestations of triumphalism in the statements of its leading European representatives. He considered as Eurocentric the speech of the former president of ICOMOS, Raymond Lemaire, who, in 1983, during the First International Congress on Architectural Conservation in Basel, argued that the principles underlying the European conservation movement had been accepted in all the countries of the world because "they were recognised as a universal aspiration, innate in human nature and man's awareness of needs associated with the development of his culture"¹⁹. It was only in subsequent years of the activity

¹³ Stoczkowski W. (2009). UNESCO's doctrine of human diversity: A secular soteriology?. *Anthropology Today* 25(3), (pp. 7-11). DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-8322.2009.00666.x.

¹⁴ Huxley J. (1946). *UNESCO: Its Purposes and Its Philosophy*. London: Preparatory Commission of the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.

¹⁵ "... the more united man's traditions becomes, the more rapid will be the possibility of progress: several separate or competing or even mutually hostile polls of tradition cannot possibly be so efficient as a single poll common to all mankind" (Huxley J. (1946). *UNESCO: Its Purposes and Its Philosophy*. London: Preparatory Commission of the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. (p. 13)).

¹⁶ Tomaszewski A. (2002) Towards a pluralistic philosophy of conservation, [in:] *Estrategias relativas al patrimonio cultural mundial. La salvaguarda en un mundo globalizado. Principios, practicas y perspectivas*. 13th ICOMOS General Assembly and Scientific Symposium. Actas. (pp. 212-215). Madrid: Comité Nacional Español del ICOMOS.

¹⁷ Choay F. (1992). *L'Allégorie du patrimoine*, Paris: Éd. du Seuil. (p. 160).

¹⁸ Glendinning M. (2013). *The Conservation Movement: A History of Architectural Preservation, Antiquity to Modernity*. London: Routledge.

¹⁹ *Ibidem* (p. 412).

of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee that it began to be realised that international conservation projects, carried out according to Western ideas about universal values, could lead to the violation of authentic ties between local communities and their heritage, and that too far-reaching a unification of conservation procedure principles could contribute to the blurring of the cultural diversity of heritage on a global scale²⁰.

One of the earliest announcements of UNESCO's cultural policy departure from the assumptions of Huxley's "scientific world humanism" was the Mexico Declaration of 1982, which predates the main theses of *The Nara Document on Authenticity* by 12 years. It stated, among other things, that "The universal cannot be postulated in the abstract by any single culture: it emerges from the experience of all the world's peoples as each affirms its own identity. Cultural identity and cultural diversity are inseparable"²¹.

It is difficult to overestimate the influence of the evolution of UNESCO's cultural policy on the changes taking place not only in the doctrine of the World Heritage Committee but also in the main trends of contemporary conservation theory. The milestones on the road to pluralism in the early 21st century include the following UNESCO documents: the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* of 2003, the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* of 2005, and the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, published in the same year, which already included the most important provisions of the *Nara Document*. The progressive relativisation of traditional European values and principles of conservation procedures is strengthened by the discovery of differences not only in the intercultural sphere but also (following the spirit of Article 11 of the *Nara Document*) within the "framework of the same culture" as evidenced by the development of concepts referring to social values in heritage protection²².

²⁰ Harrison R. (2010a). What is heritage, [in:] *Understanding the Politics of Heritage*. (pp. 5-42): Manchester: Manchester University Press; Stubbs J.H. (2009). *Time Honored: A Global View of Architectural Conservation*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

²¹ UNESCO, Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies. World Conference on Cultural Policies Mexico City, 26 July – 6 August 1982, (Art. 5). (https://culturalrights.net/descargas/drets_culturals401.pdf) (retrieved: 17.03.2022).

²² An exhaustive overview of international documents on the social values of architectural monuments has been compiled by Sroczyńska (Sroczyńska J. (2021). Wartość społeczna zabytków architektury w świetle wybranych dokumentów UNESCO, ICOMOS, Rady Europy, kształtujących teorię ochrony dziedzictwa kulturowego; The Social Value of Architectural Monuments in the Light of Selected Documents of UNESCO Icomos, the Council of Europe, Shaping the Theory of Cultural Heritage Protection. *Wiadomości Konserwatorskie – Journal of Heritage Conservation* (65), (pp. 7-19), DOI: 10.48234/WK65MONUMENTS)

Referring to the periodisation proposed by Tomaszewski, we can finally return to the question of the state of contemporary conservation theory²³. Has it been possible to overcome the “difficult legacy” of Eurocentrism? It seems so. There is no room for “beliefs and attitudes assuming that the achievements of the Western world in the theory and practice of monument conservation serving as a model of conduct for those societies that developed in other cultural circles”²⁴. Moreover, counteracting Eurocentrism, both in the sphere of conservation theory and practice, is today treated as an urgently necessary form of protecting cultural diversity. At the same time, accepting the assumptions of cultural relativism in the international conservation movement, announced by Knut Larsen in 1995, did not in fact mean abandoning universalist aspirations. The dilemmas accompanying the creation of the foundations of UNESCO's new conservation policy were reflected in the speech of Jean-Louis Luxen²⁵, who asked directly at the conference in Nara: “Why search for a universal value? Is it not pluralism itself that is the one and only true universal value?”²⁶.

Despite apparent progress in dealing with the problem of Eurocentrism, which Tomaszewski considered crucial in the transition from the second to the third period of the development of conservation theory, one may get the impression that the flower-like model of intercultural dialogue he described does not fully work in practice. If the petals of this flower are to be “regional conservation experiences and approaches”, then the condition of the “regional petal” that is supposed to correspond to Europe should be worrying. The reasons for this state of affairs can be sought in the increasingly broad, ideologised understanding of *Eurocentrism*. In contemporary works by theorists originating from the *Critical Heritage Studies* movement, an equal sign is almost put between *Eurocentrism* and *Europeanness*²⁷. It is no longer only the efforts to dominate and subordinate another culture that is considered Eurocentric. People write about a “Eurocentric approach to matter”²⁸ and discredit the idea of intrinsic values of monuments,

²³ The state of contemporary conservation theory has been analysed in Szmygin (Szmygin B. (2023). *Współczesna teoria konserwatorska w świetle tekstów doktrynalnych – zmiana paradygmatu*, [in:] *Międzynarodowe teksty doktrynalne w ochronie i konserwacji zabytków*, (pp. 31-43): Lublin, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Politechniki Lubelskiej, Polski Komitet Narodowy Międzynarodowej Rady Ochrony Zabytków ICOMOS POLSKA.)

²⁴ Krawczyk J. (2024). The Venice Charter in the light of research on conservation Eurocentrism; Karta Wenecka w świetle badań nad europocentryzmem konserwatorskim. *Wiadomości Konserwatorskie – Journal of Heritage Conservation* (79).

²⁵ Luxen J.-L. (1995). *Approches de L'authenticité: modestie et pluralism*, [in:] *Nara Conference on Authenticity in Relation to the World Heritage Convention*, Nara, Japan, 1–6 November 1994: proceedings. (p. 373). Trondheim: Tapir Publishers.

²⁶ Kondylis (Kondylis P. (2013). Etyczne zabarwienie liberalnej utopii. *Studia z Historii Filozofii* 3(4), (pp. 33-44). DOI 10.12775/szhf.2013.030), among others, wrote about the complementarity of universalism and relativism, as well as their contradictory coexistence in the contemporary system of mass democracy.

²⁷ Smith L. (2006). *Uses of Heritage*. London: Routledge.

²⁸ Schatt-Babińska K (2016). Europocentryczne i dalekowschodnie spojrzenie na wartość autentyczności zabytku – dokument z Nara jako próba pogodzenia odmiennych poglądów. *Gdańskie Studia Azji Wschodniej* (10), 2(pp. 8-40). DOI: 10.4467/23538724GS.16.014.6171.

which is, after all, the historical foundation of the European understanding of authenticity²⁹. Any attempts to academically justify the need to preserve historic substance are also considered Eurocentric³⁰.

Not everything, however, can be blamed on the emotions accompanying the rivalry of contemporary conservation discourses. One gets the impression that Europeans cannot find their way in the realities shaped by the foundations of pluralistic conservation philosophy. The growing commitment to the protection of cultural diversity is usually accompanied by a decreasing interest in their cultural traditions and indifference to the phenomenon of the collective memory of the community from which they originate. Manifestations of a kind of "moral panic" that gripped Europeans after the adoption of the *Nara Document on Authenticity* include, for example, the text of official thanks submitted by the Polish side to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in December 1997 after the decision was made to enter the Teutonic Castle in Malbork on the World Heritage List. In the context of these considerations, the following fragment takes on particular significance:

As we approach the end of the century, we are fortunately abandoning our Western European fundamentalism, based on the cult of sacred relics of Western Christianity, which led us to define the concept of "authenticity" as limited solely to material substance; an idea that we wanted to apply to other cultural regions of the world. We hope to draw conclusions from the international discussion and move towards a transcontinental consensus on the nature of authenticity in the spirit of the final document of the Nara conference³¹.

The analysis of the changes taking place in the last thirty years in international conservation theory confirms that the discussions preceding the adoption of the *Nara Document on Authenticity* set in motion the most important directions of development of global policy in the sphere of cultural heritage and leading to the relativisation of European conservation traditions and values. However, recognising these traditions and values as relative does not mean invalidating them. As part of national history, they encourage self-reflection. They can also be a source of inspiration for new regional concepts of heritage protection and conservation. When conducting intercultural dialogue in the spirit of "pluralist conservation theory", it is worth remembering the question once posed by the Marxist philosopher Leszek Kołakowski³²: "Is benevolent interest and tolerance towards other civilisations only possible when we have previously stopped taking our own seriously?"

²⁹ Harrison R. (2010a). What is heritage, [in:] *Understanding the Politics of Heritage*. (pp. 5-42): Manchester: Manchester University Press.

³⁰ Araoz G. F. (2015). Tendencje dziedzictwa dziś i jutro – z perspektywy ewolucji filozofii i teorii konserwacji; Heritage trends today and tomorrow as seen from evolving conservation philosophy and practice. *Wiadomości Konserwatorskie – Journal of Heritage Conservation* (44), (pp. 9-18). DOI: 10.17425/WK44CONSERVATION.

³¹ World Heritage Committee. (1997). Twenty-first Session, Naples, Italy, 1-6 December 1997, Report, WHC-97/CONF.208/17, (Annex VI.2). <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/repcom97.htm> (retrieved: 30.11.2022).

³² Kołakowski L. (1990). Szukanie barbarzyńcy. Złudzenia uniwersalizmu kulturalnego, [in:] *Cywilizacja na ławie oskarżonych*. (p. 11). Warszawa: ResPublica.

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